

The Committee of Four Hundred Physicians is given in a footnote.*

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American Medical Association Comments Concerning the Committee.—Regarding the recent promulgation, it may be in order to quote a press dispatch sent out from American Medical Association headquarters on November 8, the day after the article was released by the "Committee of Physicians." Press dispatch follows:

"SOCIALIZED MEDICINE" HIT BY DOCTORS

American Medical Association Fights Proposed Governmental Control of Profession

Militant medical leaders, incensed over the plan advanced by 430 "insurgent doctors" for "socialized medicine," on November 8, in Chicago, mapped a fight to prevent governmental control of the profession, according to International News Service.

The plan which drew the fire of the American Medical Association was advanced by a committee including Dr. Thomas Parran, Surgeon-General of the United States, and more than 400 other "insurgent" medical experts.

They suggested immediate allocation of public funds for medical care of the indigent and for furthering hospitals and medical schools.

Control Opposed

Dr. Morris Fishbein, Editor of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, and leader of the opposition to such a plan, declared:

"There are 106,000 doctors who belong to our group. This proposition is merely the ideas of 430 of them against the greater majority.

"We shall always oppose any effort by the Federal Government to control our profession—and that's just what this scheme would bring about."

The nine-point program of the "insurgents" has already drawn the spirited fire of the American Medical Association, a group with which most of the plan's proponents are themselves allied.

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A Lay Feature Writer's Tribute to the Committee.—In bringing these comments to a close,[†] we quote a feature writer of the International News Service, who, on November 7, in commenting on this new adventure in socialized medicine, used the following language in regard to the personnel of the "Committee of Physicians":

"... Committee of 430 internationally-known physicians, who led a 'revolt' in favor of state medicine and against the hitherto unquestioned edicts of the American Medical Association..."

* The California physicians, whose names were included in the list of 430, are as follows: William H. Barrow, San Diego; Dudley W. Bennett, San Francisco; LeRoy H. Briggs, San Francisco; Howard A. Brown, San Francisco; Philip King Brown, San Francisco; Hermon C. Bumpus, Jr., Pasadena; Loren R. Chandler, San Francisco; John Dunlop, Pasadena; Leo Eloesser, San Francisco; Ernest H. Falconer, San Francisco; P. K. Gilman, San Francisco; S. L. Haas, San Francisco; Richard W. Harvey, San Francisco; Frank Hinman, San Francisco; Samuel H. Hurwitz, San Francisco; O. W. Jones, Jr., San Francisco; William J. Kerr, San Francisco; Fred H. Kruse, San Francisco; H. Clifford Loos, Los Angeles; Frank W. Lynch, San Francisco; Francis M. McKeever, Los Angeles; Paul S. McKibben, Los Angeles; Stacy R. Mettler, San Francisco; Karl F. Meyer, San Francisco; Wayland A. Morrison, Los Angeles; Howard C. Naffziger, San Francisco; J. L. Pomeroy, Los Angeles; Frances M. Pottenger, Los Angeles; Irwin C. Schumacher, San Francisco; Henry H. Searls, San Francisco; Sidney J. Shipman, San Francisco; Edward B. Shaw, San Francisco; Francis Scott Smyth, San Francisco; Wallace I. Terry, San Francisco; John C. Wilson, Los Angeles; Sidney N. Zuckerman, San Francisco.

[†] On this same subject, see also comments on page 366, second column.

THE PRESS PROPAGANDA ON MEDICAL PREPARATIONS

Printed Publications and the Radio Have Supplanted the Spoken Word.—We are all agreed that propaganda by the press and radio has supplanted the spoken word, as understood and applied in days gone by to conversations or platform lectures. We mention this fact because a substantial number of physicians still cling to the notion that the medical profession must not lower itself by combating erroneous or lying statements concerning matters medical when such appear in the public press. In one sense, this dignity of self-respect is quite proper; but, on the other hand, and especially so under propaganda conditions which the public today constantly faces on political, economic, and social welfare and what-not subjects, it is a question whether a dignified silence by the profession, when misstatements are bandied about in public prints, may not later lead to the necessity of much more work in efforts at neutralization than if, in blunt fashion, the problems had been openly discussed at the outset. Two recent instances come to our mind in this connection, and on each we shall comment briefly.

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"Eye-Drop Insanity."—The International News Service, on August 24, printed a feature writer's dispatch with the caption, "Eye-Drop Insanity," presumably casting a slur upon the use of atropine when used as a mydriatic in examinations for refractive errors of the eyes. To show how such an article reacts upon the public, we would state that two patients called our attention to it. We had been sufficiently interested, in our own perusal of the dispatch, to write promptly to the two Boston physicians quoted, and we give below both our letter of inquiry and the reply thereto from Dr. William Dameshek, whose article was printed in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* of August 21, 1937, on page 561. Our letter follows:

(Copy)

Los Angeles, August 25, 1937.

Dear Doctors Dameshek and Feinsilver:

In the Los Angeles *Examiner* of August 24, 1937, appears an International News Service Science Editor dispatch signed by Gobind Behari Lal, having the caption, "Eye-Drop Insanity: Two Doctors Declare Atropine Causes Psychosis," and in the text it is stated:

"It is allegedly produced by the use of atropine eye drops, sometimes used in testing vision."

The item then refers to yourselves as having described five cases of such atropine insanity.

We would appreciate greatly your courtesy if you would write and give us the details concerning this, because an item such as the above can do much harm. . . .

To this letter we received the following interesting reply:

Boston, August 30, 1937.

Dear Doctor Kress:

I know only too well about the fiction which was just released by the International News Service. It is unfortunate that science editors of various newspaper services will distort scientific literature and make hash out of it. The original article was published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* for August 21 [page 561], and you will note from this article that there was no mention of atropine insanity at all. The paper was described chiefly

as a test for the psychosis produced by various members of the atropine series [scopolamine, atropine, hyocyanine, and stramonium]. The paper stressed the test; the newspapers stressed the insanity, which in reality was caused by scopolamine inadvertently used in place of homatropine. Here in Boston I tried to get them to stop publication, but they garbled the thing even more than the News Service report had it originally. Maybe you could do something about Hearst in his own home state.

Very truly yours,

WILLIAM DAMESHEK, M.D.

Comment: From the above it is very evident that the "Science Editor," (whose comments, by the way, were quoted and played up in the optometric press), has still much to learn about "science," before he assumes to exploit his interpretations to a lay public.

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Elixir of Sulfanilamide-Massengill Poisonings.—On the other hand, to cite a different instance, the daily press, after the first day or so of publicity concerning the deaths from "Elixir of Sulfanilamide-Massengill," has performed a real publicity service. The lives lost through that preparation demonstrate, in a somewhat spectacular manner—(we Americans seem to need emotional and spectacular reactions to rouse us from our lethargy on certain matters)—the need of a revision of the Federal Pure Food and Drug Laws, so that those statutes will be given teeth to more effectively prevent misbranding and adulteration. At the Conference of State Medical Association Secretaries and Editors, recently held at Chicago, it was stated that it was quite in order to write United States senators and congressmen urging revision of the federal food and drug laws in such manner as to make for better protection of the health and lives of citizens. There are several bills of this nature before Congress, but the espousal of any particular one is not necessary. It is suggested that component county societies write their federal representatives in favor of the principle of better protection through more stringent federal food and drug statutes.

Here, in California, seizures of the sulfanilamide preparation were made in San Francisco, as will be noted in the following press dispatch:

ELIXIR KILLS CALIFORNIANS

Inquiry Launched Into Four Deaths

Investigation of four deaths in California in the Federal Government's far-flung efforts to remove from the market a deadly sulfanilamide mixture was disclosed in San Francisco on November 1, by J. C. Morton, head of the United States Food and Drug Administration in San Francisco, according to Associated Press.

Morton said the deaths, the first to come under investigation in California, occurred during recent months.

The drug mixture, used for treatment of streptococci infections, is believed to have caused more than fifty deaths in other parts of the United States.

Pitiless publicity should be the treatment of drug purveyors who are responsible for such wholesale destruction of human life as was caused by this Elixir of Sulfanilamide-Massengill. That, and a revision of the Federal Pure Food Drug Act to make it more effective than under its present restrictions. Why not, therefore, have your county society pass resolutions in favor of such

revision? There never has been a better time to act in this than right now. Mention of the Elixir Sulfanilamide-Massengill to congressmen will make plain the significance of your presentation.

STATEMENT OF THE A. M. A. BOARD OF TRUSTEES ON THE "COMMITTEE OF PHYSICIANS" COMMUNICATIONS

Later News Concerning the "Committee of Physicians."—Following the transmittal to the printer of the copy for the second editorial in this number of the OFFICIAL JOURNAL of the California Medical Association, we attended the two-day session of State Association Secretaries and State Association Editors, held at the American Medical Association headquarters in Chicago on November 19 and 20. At that meeting, American Medical Association Secretary Olin West brought to the attention of the Conference the letters and press releases that had been broadcast by the "Committee of Physicians," and also a somewhat later letter of November 11, emanating from California. The latter letter and its enclosure are printed in the Letters department of this issue, on page 431.

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Statement of the Trustees Embodies Important Principles.—Concerning the communication of the Four Hundred, brought out under the name of "The Committee of Physicians," the president of the Board of Trustees of the American Medical Association, Dr. Arthur W. Booth of New York, read a statement which the American Medical Association Board of Trustees instructed should be printed in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, with release to the press on November 21. Because of the important facts and principles therein stated, this statement of the Board of Trustees is printed below.* Members of the California Medical Association who are not in accord therewith are invited to inform the California Medical Association Council of their personal opinions.

For those who think these matters of small moment, we can only say that perhaps they might and should be, were it not for the deplorable fact that expressions of self-constituted groups, such as "The Committee of Physicians," are seized upon by the enemies of scientific and organized medicine, and quoted and distorted in utter disproportion, no matter how well meaning the signers of the communications may have been.

The attention of readers is also called to a bulletin, printed in Letters department, on page 430, in which the executive officers of the California Medical Association ask the members of the California Medical Association to reflect and to inquire from the Central Office, before inadvertently signing their names to something they might later regret they had presumably espoused. The statement by the American Medical Association Board of Trustees follows:

* The Conference of State Association Secretaries and Editors, on November 19, at Chicago, by unanimous vote approved the statement of the A. M. A. Board of Trustees as here printed.

For other comments on subject here discussed, see page 363.